

HOUSING PARTNERSHIP/ FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2007

The Housing Partnership /Fair Housing Committee has broadened its involvement in housing problems facing Amherst as members have become involved in other committees related to housing issues. The Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC) has several work groups with housing being among them. Three Committee members have been a part of that group and worked with other community members to write questions for the survey being done by the CPC. The work group discussed many different perspectives, which were then brought to the attention of the Partnership. Affordable housing was a major issue mentioned at CPC public meetings, and the Partnership looks forward to the final hearings and implementation of the Master Plan.

Last summer, a task force was formed to address the homelessness in Amherst. Two Partnership members served on the task force and reported back their findings. The Task Force had several presentations regarding homelessness in the area; presenters included several representatives of local non-profits and Chief Scherpa. The Task Force prepared and distributed a brochure, to be available in Amherst, that included referral information for those in need of emergency housing. The final report will be presented to the Select Board.

Important policy decisions were discussed and voted on by the Partnership. We voted not to support a change to the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw that would limit affordability to 80% of area median income. The Committee recognized the need for a variety of affordable units in Amherst, both for residents and developers, while also being aware that Amherst could be in danger of reducing its stock of affordable housing below 10%. The potential loss of affordable housing units at Rolling Green Apartments, in 2013, is of concern in this context. With Amherst's affordable housing stock being only slightly above 10% of total housing units, the Town is vulnerable to development that bypasses local zoning regulations (M.G.L., ch.40b). The Committee made themselves aware of the importance of maintaining the level of affordable housing above 10%.

A decision was made to seek Special Municipal Employee status for the Committee, and this was approved by the Select Board. The Partnership also approved a fee-waiver policy for affordable units in housing developments to present to the Select Board.

There has been progress in providing more affordable housing this year. The Amherst Housing Authority has completed four rental units on Tamarack Drive and will soon be breaking ground on the Main Street project, which will include 11 rental units. Both projects include handicapped units. After several years in court, the Butternut Farm, a HAP project with 26 units, will be built on Longmeadow Drive. The first of four Habitat for Humanity houses to be built on land donated by Amherst College is very near completion, with another to be started this fall. The Housing Partnership proposal for CPA funds will provide three \$50,000 mortgage subsidies for people who live or work in Amherst.

Though little progress was made toward the development of housing on Olympia Drive, discussion still continues with the University. The question of ownership and maintenance of the road remains the greatest barrier. Town Manager Larry Shaffer has been very helpful in meeting with us regarding Olympia Drive and other issues.

Our directions for next year include continuing efforts regarding Olympia Drive, re-examining Municipal Housing Trusts and exploring new uses for CPA funds.

Nancy Gregg